

Tracking students by ethnicity

by [Brent Wesley](#)

A town in northwestern Ontario is doing what no other place has done since Ontario revamped its school system 10 years ago— they are tracking students by ethnicity.

In an effort to improve success of First Nations students attending public and Catholic schools in Kenora, Ont., school boards are asking students to identify themselves if they are Aboriginal.

The data is being used to track the number of First Nation students attending schools in Kenora so officials can expand on an oral language program that has provided some initial success.

The Ontario Public School Boards Association published a [Position Paper on Second Language Learning](#) in November 2005.

The paper says there needs to be increased "programming that supports the transition to success with academic English, and builds on the literacy, language and culture that First Nations children bring to school."

First Nations students face the challenge of coming from homes where English is not always the first language spoken.



Photo by Wendy Sero

As a result, First Nation children may not always be at the same literacy level as the rest of the population.

Once these children enter the education system, they may be less capable of grasping the essential building blocks of the written English language.

Tracking students by ethnicity was once a very touchy political issue, but now there is a concern that children of different backgrounds face different challenges when it comes to education.

Kenora is the first to jump on this trend of tracking students by ethnicity. Initial stats have shown that 33 per cent of students at public school boards and 23 per cent of students at Catholic schools are from First Nations.

The process of gathering ethnicity-based statistics was done with full co-operation from First Nation communities in the area surrounding Kenora.